"Dine Be keyah": The Cultural Geography and Environmental Connectedness Associated with the Religion of the Navajo Nation, Including a Brief Synopsis of Navajo Perceptions Illustrated in Sacred Clowns

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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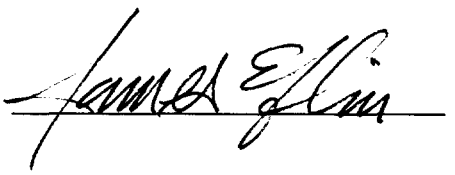

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ABSTRACT

The Navajo Nation, located in the American Southwest, are a people who have traditionally maintained a holistic perception of the landscape. A perception that discerned the entire landscape as sacred. Yet, the majority of the Navajo are currently demonstrating a lack of respect for their sacred environment, and ownership disputes concerning the natural resources on their reservation have resulted. The cause of this trend away from traditional practices can be attributed to outside economic forces and federal governmental influences.

The discussion details the Navajo religious practices and beliefs, which define the existence of the Navajo Nation. The thesis provides background on traditional Navajo thoughts and gives an explanation of the Navajo Blessingway ceremony. The landscape and the natural resources, which include vast resources of coal deposits, are examined, and the current land dispute revolving around the Hopi tribe is explored. A brief synopsis of the environmental perceptions illustrated in Tony Hillerman's Sacred Clowns is also included to provide a contemporary view on Navajo life.

THE NAVAJO ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE

> *"Across from us a great headland, buff, dull orange, iron-brown, thrust forward from the canyon wall, around it and beyond the dry sand lay in sun-dazzled, aggressive silence to the far wall. The place come at one, the place attacked. One looked and rejected. Then, trying to cope with this thing, unexpectedly I saw the sea, I remembered the quality of being out of sight of land in a small boat, I remembered barrenness, monotony, hostility, and beauty. What I was seeing was the same order, man in the same infinitesimal scale to it. I began to see the country with a rush and to know that it was beautiful and that I loved it." -Oliver La Farge*

The Navajo live in this landscape. A landscape full of rolling red hills, marble cliffs, elegantly carved buttes, and a landscape of beauty. The Navajo, or the "Dine'," have developed a more sensitive, gentle, and responsible environmental ethic than those from European ancestry. However, Americans have elevated the perception of the Indian to be that of ecological sainthood. The Navajo did not live in a pristine natural world where there would be no need or desire to manipulate the environment. The stereotype involves the idea that Native Americans were the original conservationists, instinctively practicing responsible stewardship of natural resources (Champagne, 1994). Although, the lifestyle of the Navajo was distinctly different from that of the Angloamerican, one must not stereotype because stereotypes generally distort actualities (Oelschlaeger, 1994). The management of natural resources depended on the types of resources on which the group relied, the population density, the culture, and the religious belief system which is incorporated into daily life. While the particular practices varied widely, the Navajo engaged in activities designed to change the environment to better suit their needs, but the land was always considered sacred. The land was utilized for both sustenance and religious purposes. Historically, the Navajo have upheld the elements of the environment to the highest plateau through traditional religious beliefs, ceremonies, and rituals; however, current land uses by

the majority of the Navajo people indicate a decrease in appreciation for certain places on the landscape, and ownership disputes for the natural resources of the earth have resulted. External economic forces and federal governmental influences have forced many Navajo to deter from traditional ways of life. The traditional Navajo appreciation for the natural resources of the environment has been compromised so that the people can survive economically within the jurisdiction of the United States.

The Navajo have subsisted in North America for many centuries. Approximately 1,000 years ago, the ancestors of the present Navajo Nation migrated from what is today the boundaries of Alaska and Canada to the southwestern United States. The Tewa people, who were living in pueblos in the region where the Navajo moved, named these newcomers the "Navajo," which means "people of the cultivated field" (Knowles, 1997). The Navajo continued to reside in the southwest, and in the 1600's, the people began to raise sheep. However, during this time there were an increasing number of white settlers developing ranches on the same lands where Navajo resided. Thus, the Native Americans fought to drive the ranchers away, and this conflict continued into the nineteenth century. During the early 1860's, rumors that gold could be found within the Navajo boundaries escalated, and Colonel Kit Carson was ordered by the U. S. Army to invade the Navajo lands in 1864. Troops, led by Carson, destroyed homes, burned fields of corn, slaughtered livestock, and obliterated orchards of the Navajo, and the Navajo were forced to begin the "Long Walk" due to starvation. During the Long Walk, U. S. soldiers forced approximately 8,000 Navajos to march more than 300 miles from their high desert and alpine homeland to Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Upon reaching the fort, the people were put in prison, and thousands of people died during both the imprisonment and the march (Knowles, 1997).

Because so many people had died, the Natannis (chiefs) felt defeated and wanted to return home, and they made peace with the government by signing the Treaty of 1868. The Treaty granted the Navajo people livestock because "they promised to live peacefully with the U. S. settlers" (Mummert, 1997). The Treaty resulted in the Navajo losing some of their freedom regarding the land because they were now required to live on a reservation.

Currently, the Navajo Nation is the largest Native nation in the United States. The 160,000 Navajo live on the largest reservation in America, which encompasses 17 million acres, in more than 50 different clans (Mummert, 1997). Thus, due to population increases, the people have had to adapt their traditional culture to the new forms of technology and incorporate these ideas into their everyday life. Therefore, an integration of new forms of livelihood, basic values, and spirit has taken place. However, the purpose of the traditional Navajo life "is to maintain balance between the individual and the universe and to live in harmony with nature and the Creator" (Panthology, 1997).

This balance can be discovered in most Native American traditions and beliefs. In fact, it could be argued that these tribal religions are the lasting remnants of the "oldest religion" of human kind, a religion that has been developing for some three million years (Oelschlaeger, 1994). According to Max Oelschlaeger in Caring for Creation, generally the native peoples of the continent have obtained their sense of sacred from physical and metaphysical elements of the environment. The religion of most Native American tribes defined "sacred" as all living and nonliving components of the landscape in which humans have no greater creation value than a bumblebee, a gila monster, or even the moon. The people are not superior to the nonhuman world, but they are a part of its very existence. The native people identify with the earth, and the

earth has become a part of their moral conscience. The creation stories that Native Americans uphold demonstrate a solid and meaningful respect for all life on the earth. Indigenous religions have established a connection with the spirit world that is real and immediate. The connection involves a more Earth-based tradition of worship that can be observed in the tradition of worship associated with the native population. The rituals demonstrate where and how the people fit into creation (Van Gool, 1997). However, the rituals are not based on the premise that the earth is an immortal personification. Instead, the earth serves as a metaphor associated with motherhood, whereby the earth is the mother, and the people are her children. The people do not want to be severed from their mother because they depend on this land (mother) for their very existence (Kelley and Francis, 1993). Therefore, the native populations perceive themselves and their societies as part of a sacred and symbolic landscape, where the Amerindian peoples live in harmony with nature (Oelschlaeger, 1994).

Like the various indigenous religions of North America, the Navajo people also perceive themselves as part of a sacred landscape. The environment can be associated with the majority of Navajo beliefs, ceremonies, and traditions. The essence of the Navajo people has been their relationship with the land (Panthology, 1997). The religion of the Navajo people is highly ritualized, formal, and precise, and the purpose of these practices is to maintain the life and health of both the individual and the community. One of the primary events of the religion is the practice of the "chant." The chant is often a ceremony that lasts for several days and nights, and the purpose is to reestablish an individual's relationship with the powers of creation. In general, the religion of the Navajo is oriented toward prayer because the people believe the world was created through a prayer (Spickard, 1991). Although, the term "religion" has been used to describe the

beliefs of the Navajo, the Navajo language does not provide a word that equates to the word "religion." The term does not exist because the Navajo express their acknowledgment of the divine through their ways of living. For instance, "one could almost say that Navajo life and the stories and beliefs and customs that go with it are Navajo religion" (Kelley and Francis, 1993).

Philosophy does not drive the force behind Navajo religion, but experience is the avenue by which the people express their beliefs. These experiences are often associated with the earth as well. For instance, the teachings of the Navajo religion provide a guide for living that is in accordance with the cycles of the days and seasons. Each quadrant of the day and each season of the year illustrate specific lessons for living a complete and whole life. The cycling is continued on a larger scale by relating the seasons of the year with the phases of one's life (Bitsuie, 1997). Thus, just as the seasons of the year change, the Navajo believe themselves to change from year to year. The Navajo also believe that since creation, man has been trying to become one with the universe, and thus, this is the reason why man identifies with all parts of the existing worlds of the universe. These existing worlds of the universe include four underworlds, the sky immediately above, and the land-beyond-the-sky. The worlds are superimposed upon one another, and together they form the earth that the Navajo deem sacred. As the earth restores its youth through these worlds, the Navajo count on these patterns and believe these same patterns may also happen to them.

As mentioned, most Native Americans associate the earth as their "mother," and the Navajo are no exception. According to Bitsuie, the Navajo believe that the earth, as the source from which all life comes, is the mother of all people and a living being herself. She, like any other person, has organs, which are various geological formations, and veins and arteries, which

are rivers and streams. She, the earth, would die as any human who has had their organs removed. If, however, the land is cared for and respected properly, it will continue to provide for the people. Thus, according to traditional Navajo beliefs, the earth should be treasured and be kept honored. There are also certain basic tenets of Navajo cosmogony that attribute special power to certain events or processes in the natural world. These events and processes include lightning strikes and the first rays of dawn (Kelley and Francis, 1993). In general, the cosmogony of Navajo religion teaches that the earth should not be injured, and the teachings include respect for both plants and animals. The Navajo people relate with plants and animals because their story of creation recalls a time when humans lived in kinship with other animals and plants (Oelschlaeger, 1994).

The Navajo demonstrate tremendous respect towards vegetation by conveying a sentimental attitude toward the plants in their region. Although the Navajo refrain from cultivating flowers for beauty, they do provide descriptions of the landscape that show great appreciation for the abundant wild flowers on the landscape. Every plant is a symbol of vegetation that neither man nor animals could exist without, and flowers are treated ceremonially. For instance, it is sacrilegious to pick plants without using them in a ritual or to let cut flowers wither, and these practices are considered dangerous because they bring absolutely no aesthetic compensation compared to vegetation left untouched (Reichard, 1950a).

> *"The great pines stand at a considerable distance from each other. Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone. They so not intrude upon each other. The Navajos are not much in the habit of giving or of asking help. Their language is not a communicative one, and they never attempt an interchange of personality in speech. Over their forests there is the same inexorable reserve. Each tree has its exalted power to bear."*
>
> *-Willa Cather*

In addition to vegetation, animal life is also respected by the traditions of the Navajo teachings. Throughout history, the tribe has depended upon domesticated animals for subsistence, and the emphasis of rare game animals can still be found in the religious beliefs. However, it should be noted that these rare game animals (elk, antelope, deer, and mountain sheep) are currently quite scarce in the Navajo environment for various reasons. Each of the rare game animals (Dini') are especially valued ritualistically, but as mentioned, are so scarce that many children have never seen one (Reichard, 1950a). Because the Dini' have become so rare, sheep are now a ceremonial substitute for the rare game animals, but the sheep are not thought to have any supernatural powers. Both sheep and other livestock are considered to be gifts from the Holy People that should be cared for in return for sustenance (Bitsuie, 1997). The Navajo do not expect to get power from the sheep, except indirectly through wealth. For example, the old-fashioned Navajo counts his wealth in sheep. Thus, the domesticated animals get little religious respect, but the Navajo do depend on them as a source of food and economic status. This dependence leads to a reciprocating relationship between the people and the animals. The animals provide wealth and sustenance in return for care and protection. Therefore, the loss of animals, as with the loss of land, damages the Navajos sense of pride in themselves and their ability to provide for their families on their own (Bitsuie, 1997).

Ceremonies involved in the religion of the Navajo Nation include intricate stories and legends, including the Navajo story of creation referred to as "Blessingway." All ceremonies of the Navajo are different in ceremonial procedure, and all ceremonies require the re-creation of the Navajo world. For a ceremony to occur, something must be out of the ordinary, and the ceremony is designed to restore the order of the individual's life (Spickard, 1991). Ceremonies

are an integral part of the daily routine of the Dine', and the Dine' describe their religion as life itself (Bitsuie, 1997). All religious ceremonies happen in the family hogan, which is the Navajo home. The hogan is made of logs and mud with a door that traditionally faces east. The floor of the hogan represents Mother Earth and the round roof symbolizes Father Sky. The hogan binds the Navajo family to the land of their birth. The family is bound to the hogan because at birth, the afterbirth and umbilical cords of the Navajo infants are offered to a designated site, such as a tree, right outside of the hogan walls. The tree and child grow together and share a sacred bond that continues throughout the life of each. During the ceremonies, offerings of turquoise, white shell, and abalone are made to sacred sites such as rocks, springs, buttes, herbal gathering areas, and trees to obtain blessings and protection. Therefore, because the ceremonies require regular access to sacred places and plants, the Navajo require occupancy of the land that they deem sacred (Panthology, 1997).

The Blessingway ceremony is the foundation of the Navajo way of life. The purpose of the ceremony is hozho, which is the acquiring of peace, harmony, and protection. Thus, the realization of the goal of a long, happy life is obtained. Blessingway is the story of creation of the Navajo people, and the ceremony closely depicts the periods of the earth's evolution by standards of western science (Knowles, 1997). Thus, the Blessingway intertwines appropriate environmental perceptions into the lives of the Navajo, and it is retold at all major events, including building houses, before journeys, and marriages. The ceremony usually takes two days to complete and focuses on the story of Changing Woman. Changing Woman has come to illustrate the inner form of the earth through its seasonal transformations, and she is considered the most loved and respected figure among the Holy People in Navajo beliefs (Van Gool, 1997).

The Blessingway story is often told as follows: First Man and First Woman emerged onto this world near Huefano Mountain in New Mexico. First Man found a baby on a nearby mountain, and the baby matured in four days to become Changing Woman. Changing Woman created the four original Navajo clans from her body. Her sons rid the land of dangerous monsters between the land of the four sacred mountains. Thus, the land was safe to inhabit forever by the Navajo tribe (Panthology, 1997). The ceremony recounts in detail the instructions Changing Woman gave to the Navajo people that she created. The teachings include history and major religious practices, such as a girl's puberty rite and the consecration of a family's hogan.

The ritual experience of the Blessingway ceremony is not a copy of the original world-creation. In the eyes of the Navajo, the ceremony literally recreates the world (Spickard, 1991). The Blessingway expresses everything that the Navajo believe is good, and the ceremony is good for hope in order for man to obtain blessings for a long and happy life. The ceremony is also considered to be beneficial to the entire community of Navajo people because as people experience the story again, the world is renewed. The earth was considered perfect at creation, and telling and experiencing this story restores this perfection for the Navajos. The Blessingway ceremony is the way to secure an environment of perfect beauty (Spickard, 1991).

Like the ritual associated with the Blessingway ceremony, traditional Navajo beliefs also incorporate environmental perceptions that respect the elements of the landscape. The universe is believed to contain both hostile and friendly forces, and life is considered a constant cycle. The cycle flows in a circular motion and comprises growth, death, and new life. The cycle must begin and end at the same point. For instance, when the umbilical cord and afterbirth are planted by a tree upon birth of a Navajo child, this begins the growth; when this Navajo dies, their remains are

given back to the earth and the cycle may continue. Therefore, the cycle is always in constant motion. Traditional teachings explain that the material world is devoid of any spiritual meaning or significance. The world is viewed holistically because all things are connected to one another and interact according to a natural order. The religion of the Navajo prescribes not only observing this order, but living in harmony (*hozho*) with the premise that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction (Bitsuie, 1997). The people believe that any disruption to the natural order of things will result in irrevocable damage to both the environment and themselves. The Navajo feel that if they do not follow the natural law, family members or they themselves could suffer from mental and physical illness. Also, if natural law is not undertaken, there is the fear that the world will come to an end (Bitsuie, 1997).

Other traditional beliefs incorporate this natural order into everyday life. The land, air, water, and sunlight that go into the production of food are incorporated into the flesh of the people. Among these substances are also the essences of the immortal beings like Changing Woman. Thus, by consuming the fruits of the land, the people also take in the essences of the immortal beings into their own flesh (Kelley and Francis, 1993). Traditionally, the Navajo people have always been on the move (of course, today in 1997, the Navajo are concentrated on a reservation in the southwestern U. S.). The Navajo loved to travel; yet, they seemed to demonstrate a deep attachment to the habitat which they inhabited at the time. Thus, the number of place names in myth and ritual are numerous (Reichard, 1950a).

In association with the numerous place names, the Navajo also have a plethora of sites that are considered sacred to their people. Places on the landscape are considered extremely important in tradition and everyday life. For instance, the religion of the Navajo could be

described as "site-specific" (Bitsuie, 1997). The people have certain places in the environment that serve as the foci of various religious practices. However, the entire landscape is sacred in the eyes of the traditional Navajo individual. One place can not be singled out as more significant than another. The places do have particular distinct significant qualities that make them important, but the place's connectedness and function associated with the overall system (the whole land) are what sustain the Navajo people and their way of life (Kelley and Francis, 1993). A place becomes important because it is part of the larger landscape and can be associated with a story or traditional ritual, and it is a location where people have performed activities that keep Navajo life going (Kelley and Francis, 1993). The places can not be seen as isolated because somehow they must be connected with the overall system.

The places, which are all intertwined, are features of the natural landscape, and include the following:

- Mountains
- Rock outcrops
- Springs and other bodies of water
- Areas where certain plants grow
- Isolated trees
- Air vents in rocks
- Flat open areas
- Hills
- Canyons
- Natural discolorations on rocks
- Mineral deposits
- Places where rocks produce echoes
- Sand dunes
- Lightning struck trees and rocks

These are the types of places that are considered significant to the Navajo people. Thus, the people have traditionally been taught from generation to generation that the land is of importance and must be woven into the daily scheme of living. The features of the natural landscape are utilized so that people may offer prayers or gather water, plants, minerals, and other natural materials that are used in ceremonies, food, handicrafts, or even medicine (Kelley and Francis, 1993). There are sites, which do include the whole Navajo territory, that are thought to be

significant to the entire Nation, as well as to individual clans or extended families (Bitsuie, 1997). For instance, there are sites where a sacred event in history took place that all Navajo consider significant. An example of such a sacred site would be Canyon de Chelly. Canyon de Chelly was inhabited by the predecessors of the modern Puebloan Indian tribes who built a series of cliff dwellings in the deep recesses of the walls of the canyon. Thus, Canyon de Chelly occupies a special place in both Navajo mythology and Navajo history (Goodman, 1982).

> *"For ages and ages the plans have been made;*
> *For ages and ages the plans of the Sacred Mountains have been made."*
> *-Origin Legend*

When considering sacred sites of the Navajo, the vegetation is considered the dress of the earth, but the mountains serve a distinct purpose for the Navajo. The four sacred mountains define their physical land base as well as their spiritual home on the planet and include Blanca Peak, Colorado (Sis Naaini); Mount Taylor, New Mexico (Tsoodzil); San Francisco Peaks, Arizona (Dook'o'oostiid); and Hesperus Peak, Colorado (Dibe' Nitsaa). The Navajo Nation is defined and bounded by these four sacred mountains as shown in Figure 1. The land within these boundaries is called "Din'e Be keyah" or the "Navajo land" (Bitsuie, 1997). The mountains are considered a gift bestowed at creation as a function of Changing Woman's annual rejuvenation by the Navajo people (Reichard, 1950a). Traditionally, the mountains are considered the Father and the Mother of the Navajo people, and the people depended on the land that laid between the

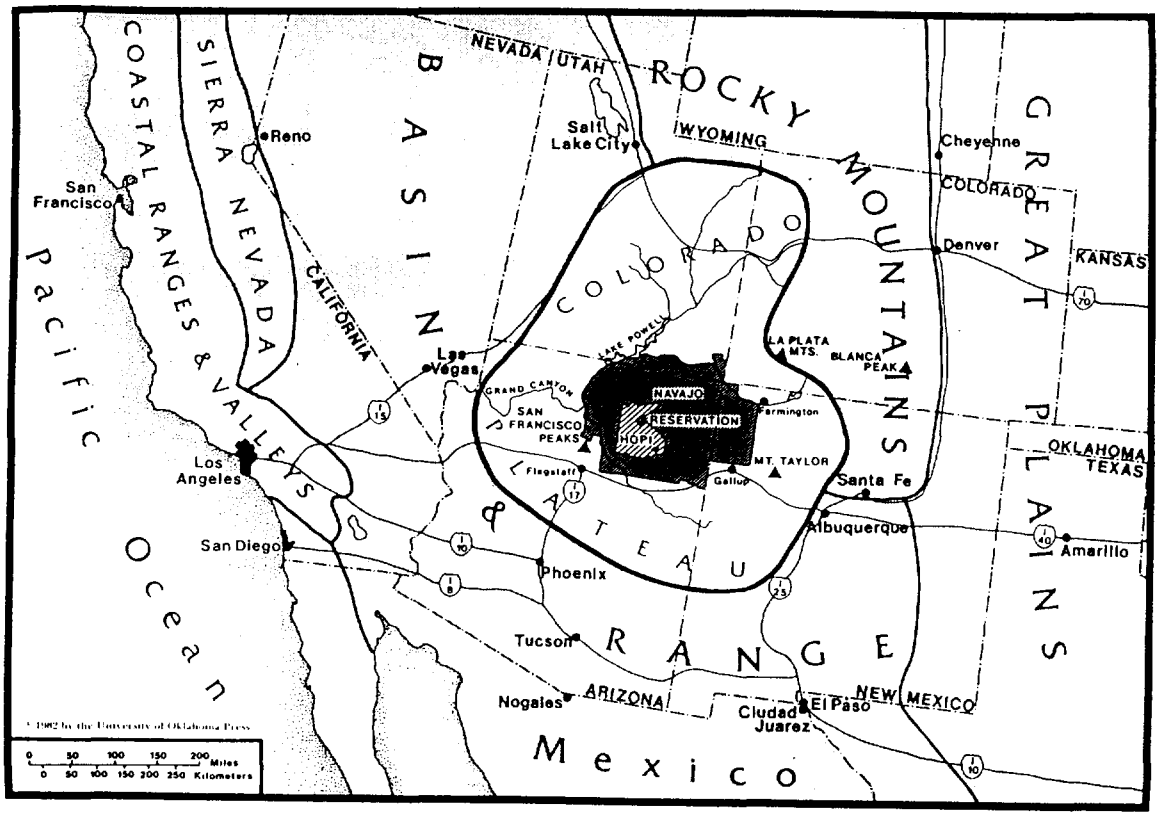

Figure 1

Source: Goodman, James M. The Navajo Atlas: Environments, Resources, People, and History of the Dine' Bikeyah. 1982, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma.

four sacred mountains for everything. The small mountains that are located within this sacred area are thought to have been created by the Navajos themselves, and each mountain is considered to be a person. The water courses are their veins and arteries, and water in them is their life as our blood is to our bodies (Reichard, 1950b). Even the hogans of the Navajo replicate the schematics of the Din'e Be keyah. The hogan has four main posts that correspond with each mountain. The door faces east because that is the direction where life began, and there is a fireplace in the center of the hogan to represent where life emerges.

"In the house of long life, there I wander.
In the house of happiness, there I wander.
Beauty before me, with it I wander.
Beauty behind me, with it I wander.
Beauty above me, with it I wander.
Beauty all around me, with it I wander.
In old age traveling, with it I wander.
On the beautiful trail I am, with it I wander."
-Song

The teachings of the Navajo claim that the people must live on the land between the four sacred mountains and care for the environment that lies in between. The mountains form somewhat of a boundary and everything on the landscape among them are sacred to the Navajo tribe. According to the traditional teachings, "it is only on this land that the Creator intended the Dine' to live and all that they need to survive would be provided for within its borders" (Bitsuie, 1997). Also, the people are to give attention to the animals and plants, which were given to them as gifts from the Creator, that have been placed in this particular area. The land between these mountains is where the Navajos developed their unique culture that defines who they are today, and it is where their stories of religious lore are set (Bitsuie, 1997). The Navajos firmly believe that they have an obvious responsibility to remain and care for the land where they were placed by the Creator, the land of Din'e Be keyah. The knowledge of the sacred places carries with it an obligation to care for these places through the appropriate offerings, prayers, and songs (Panthology, 1997).

"It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.
I, I am the spirit within the earth...
The feet of the earth are my feet...
The legs of the earth are my legs...
The bodily strength of the earth is my bodily strength...
The thoughts of the earth are my thoughts...
The voice of the earth is my voice...
The feather of the earth is my feather...
All that belongs to the earth belongs to me...
All that surrounds the earth surrounds me...
I, I am the sacred words of the earth...
It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed."
-Song of the Earth Spirit, Origin Legend

The Navajo religion is defined by and cannot be separated from its relationship to specific geographical places (Panthology, 1997). The people have a sense of the love of place, or "topophilia," and the term "sacred" embraces much more than it does in the national principle that separates church and state in the United States. There exists a power in the natural landscape that makes people prefer specific sites for gathering raw materials for religious use (Kelley and Francis, 1993). For example, the power of some natural features might have the capability to be the source of medicinal plants or other natural materials that could be used for ceremonies or other rituals. In addition, some elements of the environment have too much power for residence, grazing, or other everyday uses, and such uses should be limited, if not forbidden. These places could include spots on the larger landforms or other areas in the surrounding country, like entire hills, mountains, or canyons (Kelley and Francis, 1993).

NATURAL RESOURCES WITHIN THE NAVAJO TERRITORY

"The earth is looking at me; it is looking up at me;
I, I am looking down at it.
I, I am happy, he is looking at me;
I, I am happy, I am looking at him.

The sun is looking at me; it is looking down at me;
I, I am looking up at it.
I, I am happy, it is looking at me;
I, I am happy, I am looking at it."
-Chant, When They Say Each Other, Origin Legend

Unfortunately, a great deal of the Navajo landscape has been undermined by economic development including coal and uranium mining, electrical power generation, lumber milling, and other industrial manufacturing processes. The customary activities in which the Navajo engage have been disrupted by the destruction of the important places on the land (Kelley and Francis, 1993). The Navajo way of life centers around integrating the landbase into everyday practices, and economic development has appeared to be luring the younger Navajo generation away from the traditional Navajo way. However, it must be noted that the region in which the Navajo reside is mainly arid and generally will not support enough agriculture and livestock to provide a livelihood for everyone. Therefore, most people realize that the land can no longer support most Navajos with the old ways of herding and farming. Most Navajos must work for large-scale productive enterprises or in government jobs (Kelley and Francis, 1993). The Navajo have had to turn away from the traditional livelihood in order to survive financially. For instance, thousands earn their living as transient workers away from the Navajo reservation. Also, large numbers of Navajos have settled on irrigated lands along the lower Colorado River and in such places as Los Angeles and San Francisco. Approximately, twenty percent of the Navajo people

live off of the reservation. Under the federal government's Indian Relocation Program of the 1950's, most Navajo who relocated chose California, since a large number were already living there due to construction on the Sante Fe Railroad since the 1920's (Champagne, 1994). Thus, the people have had to leave the traditional setting to survive economically, and this migration is constant.

The Navajo reservation is a region that has increasingly been developing economically, but only a minority of the Navajo population enjoy the economic benefits. There is a wide gap between the wealth of Navajo territory and the overwhelming poverty of its residents, and unemployment is approximately fifty percent (Champagne, 1994). Most of the people who are unemployed are unskilled, speak little English, and lack a formal American education. Although the federal government has provided funds to relieve the symptoms of poverty, the average Navajo per capita income is only $1,000 a year. Thus, the chief beneficiaries of the economic development are the Navajo employees running the federal bureaucracy on the reservation. These particular people make up a privileged group that has a vested interest in keeping and expanding the tribal government bureaucracy (Champagne, 1994).

The land of the Navajo has also become a world tourist destination because of its magnificent sites, which include: Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, and Lake Powell. The Navajo land contains rich mineral deposits in the form of uranium, coal, and petroleum, and many non-traditional Navajo people favor the development of these resources (Knowles, 1997). The territory is rich in reserve subsurface minerals and resources: 100 million barrels of oil; 25 billion cubic feet of natural gas; 5 billion tons of surface coal; and 80 million pounds of uranium (Champagne, 1994). The major companies that can be found on the reservation are AMOCO,

Exxon, Gulf, Kerr-McGee, and Texaco. In addition, there are 500,000 acres of commercial forest on the Navajo reservation controlled by the Navajo government, and the forests yield millions of dollars annually.

One might question how the Navajos can allow the sanctity of the environment, which is so holistically interwoven, to be so damaged via the previous mining and foresting activities. "Without Navajos living the customary life on the land, the places will no longer be part of a living cultural system and the landscape that it animates. They will only commemorate the part existence of a dead culture" (Kelley and Francis, 1993). Traditional Navajos fear that the culture of their people has begun to be undermined by these outside economic forces.

Although traditional Navajo people still follow the natural order presented by the teachings of the Navajo religion, current land use illustrated by a majority of the Navajos presents a case deviant from an environmental perception that involves respect for the landscape in its entirety. The lack of respect can be defended upon investigation of the 780 megawatt, coal-fired Four Corners Power Plant located in Page, Arizona. The Four Corners Power Plant is owned by WEST Group, which is a consortium of twenty-three energy-production companies based in Salt Lake City, Utah (Churchill, 1986). Thus, the economic beneficiaries are outsiders and not the general Navajo population. In fact, the Navajo are suffering the most costs with the degradation of their sacred lands due to hovering plumes and acid rain. The smoke from the plant has caused a radical increase in the acidity of the rainfall throughout the region, and damage to wildlife and vegetation has been a consequence (Churchill, 1986).

The plant supplies large cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Las Vegas. The Navajo generating station has been the source of 12 percent of all sulfur dioxide emissions in the West.

The facility has three 775 feet smokestacks that emit 200 to 265 tons of sulfur dioxide daily. At times, the smog created from these emissions has obstructed the view of the Grand Canyon (Rauber, 1992). The facility emits a huge and dense plume of smoke that is visible from space (Churchill, 1986). The prevailing winds of the area carry the pollution to the west, but sometimes the plume does not blow toward the canyon. If the pollution is not destined for the Grand Canyon, the plume is likely to be polluting one or more of the eight other Class I areas (classification of the most pristine regions of the American landscape) ringing the plant, including Petrified Forest, Mesa Verde, Canyonlands, and Arches national parks (Rauber, 1992). In addition, a group of researchers at Brigham Young University found that up to 65 percent of the haze at Bryce Canyon National Park could be traced to the Navajo plant, which is 60 miles away (Rauber, 1992). According to a 1987 National Park Service study, the Navajo plant was attributed with up to 70 percent of the winter haze in the Grand Canyon, and it was getting to the point where visitors could not see from one rim to another on some days (Rauber, 1992). Also, the formerly crystalline air of Monument Valley provided visibility of up to 100 miles, but now the valley is clogged with enough pollution to reduce lines of vision to fifteen miles or less in some cases (Churchill, 1986). When the plant opened in 1974 it had no emissions control, and the Secretary of the Interior, William Hickel, assured the public that "the plant would not be allowed to degrade views in the Grand Canyon, and that it could easily be fitted with pollution-control equipment later" (Rauber, 1992). Obviously, this has not been the case. Scrubbers have been in existence for many years, and Navajo operators have stalled on obtaining this technology for the plant.

Yet, the U. S. government must suffer the blame for a majority of the environmental

problems associated with the Four Corners facility. For instance, the significant pollution problems on the Navajo reservation have continued to be unaffected by the major environmental laws. While the federal government has always had the responsibility to enforce those laws on the reservation, no funds were budgeted for that purpose. While millions of dollars were provided to states to create environmental protection departments, the Navajo tribe saw no such funding. Recently, Congress has changed many statutes so that the sovereign Navajo reservation would have the same rights as the states are granted. However, the Environmental Protection Agency still retains the responsibility for protecting the Navajo lands, but funding for this purpose is low compared to other states for the number of acres and for the numbers of unidentified problems (Champagne, 1994).

The Navajo Nation earns millions of dollars a year from the mining of the vast coal deposits in the Four Corners region. A new coal-powered power plant, Navajo South Project, has been proposed in addition to the existing Four Corners plant. The facility would be built on the Navajo Indian reservation, and would be able to produce 1,500 to 2,000 megawatts of electricity. The plant would be coal-fired, and the coal for the plant would be mined in the Four Corners area. One of the largest strip mines in the United States, the San Juan Coal Field, is located in northwestern New Mexico, and this would be the site of the proposed Navajo South Project. The plant would be built in two phases, and the first 1,000 megawatt phase could be operating by 2001 if demand is appropriate. The Navajo Nation has already leased the land to a mining company on which the power plant and mining operations would take place. The Navajo tribes will receive royalty payments and are considering becoming an equal partner in the proposed project. This would be the first ownership role in a power plant on their lands.

Therefore, the Navajo people would be participants in a practice that is not usually considered "environmentally-friendly." Perceptions of the landscape have been altered to more economic considerations rather than the traditional religious beliefs of treating the landscape as sacred. Completely altering the landscape for coal mining and power generation is not considered a sacred practice by traditional Navajo people.

LAND DISPUTE

"The people walk over me.
The old men all say to me, I am beautiful..."
-The Chant of the Beautiful Mountains of East and West

As mentioned, there are still many Navajo people who live in accordance with the traditional religious teachings. These people feel that they have the responsibility to maintain the land, culture, and traditions of the Navajo Nation. Thus, the continuation of these responsibilities are the basis for the inherited rights to the lands. The Navajo are to live in harmony with environment as granted by the authority of the Creator. However, the Navajo are involved in a land dispute with the Hopi tribe that includes the issue of property and ownership. In the traditional teachings, the land is not divided and owned as personal property, but these beliefs have been incurred due to European-American ways of life (Kelley and Francis, 1993). Historically, the Navajo and Hopi tribes had lived interspersed on the disputed territory in northern Arizona before the reservations were created. Thus, both tribes claim ancestral, cultural, and religious ties to the land, and these claims have complicated any attempts to share the land or to divide it (Safford, 1997).

The Navajo Reservation actually surrounds the Hopi Indian Reservation, and the U. S. government is a factor in the area disputed by the two nations. The dispute stems from President

Chester Arthur's 1882 executive order which created the Hopi Reservation and the 1934 law which created the Navajo reservation (Safford, 1997). However ineffective the attempts have been, the government has attempted to settle some of the land disputes. For instance in 1974, Congress divided the land in Arizona that the Navajos and Hopis had been feuding over since 1962. Also in 1974, Congress enacted a law that created a definite border distinguishing separate Navajo and Hopi lands, and the government created the Navajo-Hopi Relocation Program to pay for moving expenses and the construction of new homes for families that chose to relocate their own tribal lands (Safford, 1997). The traditional Navajo people have opposed this program with great determination. The Navajos have maintained that moving away from their land would prevent them from practicing their traditional religion and eventually lead to the dissolution of their culture (Bitsuie, 1997).

Currently, there is a proposed relocation of the Navajo community who live on the disputed lands of Black Mesa. The relocation would be to 400,000 acres of land called "New Lands," which is located on the Rio Puerco and is downstream of Church Rock, New Mexico (Bitsuie, 1997). Church Rock is the site of a large radioactive spill that occurred in 1979. Thus, the Navajo do not look kindly on this location because of the potential environmental hazard and moving away from the land, which is integral to their traditional way of life. The Navajo resisting the relocation from Black Mesa are traditional Dine' people, and many of these people are non-English speaking elders. The traditional people of Black Mesa continue to survive in the harsh desert climate by following the teachings of their ancestors and live without running water, electricity, and paved roads (Bitsuie, 1997). The Navajo of the disputed area are self-sustaining and support themselves by herding sheep and cattle, while simultaneously caring for their sacred

land. These are the people resisting the proposed relocation to the "New Lands." The relocation would allow for the ancestral sacred land to be mined for billions of dollars of coal (Blackgoat, 1997). Thus, the federal government is potentially forcing the Navajo off of their land just as they had done in the nineteenth century during the Long Walk.

SYNOPSIS OF SACRED CLOWNS BY TONY HILLERMAN

Within the context of Sacred Clowns, Tony Hillerman illustrated the influences of the federal government on the Navajo Nation. Hillerman provided a concise depiction of the structure of the law enforcement structure within the Navajo Reservation. The structure of the law enforcement involves both the local Navajo Police and outside federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Thus, traditional Navajo practices were continuously affected by the "rules" of the United States government.

Throughout the novel, Sacred Clowns, Tony Hillerman also made appropriate references to the sacred Navajo landscape and Navajo religious practices while simultaneously illustrating three well-orchestrated murder cases. The cases involved a hit-and-run accident, a mysterious high school shop keeper murder, and a murder of a respected and religious uncle of a runaway teenager. The cases are to be solved by Officer Jim Chee and Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn of the Navajo Tribal Police. Officer Jim Chee was not only an officer of the law, but he was also a *hataalii*, which is a medicine man to those not familiar with the Navajo Reservation. The goal of a *hataalii* was to keep the people in harmony with all that surrounded them. The "sacred clowns" were actually part of a Hopi ceremony, with which the two murders were connected. The clowns were supposed to represent the fact that humanity can do wrong, but the spirits do everything right. The idea of the ceremony was to illustrate how the people (the clowns) do wrong by trying

to accumulate material wealth.

Because Jim Chee was also a *hataalii*, he was continuously demonstrating that his Navajo religion had always given him purpose of living. For instance, Chee actually solved the hit-and-run case quite easily. The man, Clement Hoski, who had committed the hit-and-run murder was drunk at the time and did not intentionally kill the man in the case. Hoski was raising his grandson, Ernie, who had fetal alcohol syndrome, and Hoski rarely drank. Hoski and his grandson, Ernie, were on their own. Hoski had actually confessed his drunken actions on the local radio station, but the people at the station were unable to provide a distinct depiction of Hoski. Yet, Chee utilized the clues he had obtained and found the home of Hoski and Ernie. Chee befriended Ernie, and Chee realized that arresting Hoski and sending him to jail would not bring back the man he had hit. Thus, in the traditional Navajo way, he allowed Hoski to go free, and Jim hoped that Hoski would heal himself through a ceremonial ritual, which was of much greater significance to the traditional Navajo. By participating in such a ritual, Hoski would be cured of his unapproved action, and once again, Hoski would realize just how short he fell from the perfection of the spirits.

The concept of *hozho* is also discussed by Hillerman in Sacred Clowns. All Navajo have somewhat of a different understanding of what *hozho* means to them, but all Navajo realize that *hozho* is the idea of harmony. Harmony is the root and foundation of the religion passed on by the Navajo ancestry. Unfortunately, the realm of *hozho* had been affected by the more modern Navajo community, a community that had to work eight hours a day, five days a week. It is a community that has been affected by outside economic and governmental influences. The younger *hataalii* have had to actually break up some of the practiced ceremonies into two

weekends so that the working Navajo people could all participate. The lack of continuity in the ceremonies bucks the traditional practices of the tribe, and the traditional Navajo *hataalii* feel that these practices are poison and do more harm than good because the practices have been influenced so heavily by "modern American materialism" (Hillerman, 1993, p. 275).

Hillerman portrayed the struggle between traditional Navajo practices and the need to assimilate to the modern market of materialism quite effectively in the book. Officer Jim Chee was continuously trying to retain his Navajo traditions while abiding by both tribal and federal laws. The punishments recommended by the federal system usually do not coincide with traditional tribal practices, and Jim Chee had to maintain this balance in his life as both police official and hataalii.

CONCLUSION

In beauty may I walk.
All day long may I walk.
Through the returning seasons may I walk.
Beautifully will I possess again.
Beautifully birds...
Beautifully joyful birds...
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
With grasshoppers about my feet may I walk.
With dew about my feet may I walk.
With beauty may I walk.
With beauty before me may I walk.
With beauty behind me may I walk.
With beauty above me may I walk.
With beauty all around me may I walk.
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.
It is finished in beauty.
It is finished in beauty.

-Prayer, Night Way

The Navajo inhabited the southwestern landscape long before the concept of the United

States had even been envisioned. Traditional Navajo teachings emphasize *hozho*, which is living in harmony with the physical and spiritual realm. The traditional teachings are still being taught by the elder Navajo people, but as the younger generation moves off the reservation to find a more economically-promising livelihood, the traditions of the Navajo are becoming more of a thought rather than a practice. Their religion is the way of life for the traditional Navajo people, but the younger followers of the Navajo religion have been aroused by outside pull factors such as employment and modernization. The Navajo must continue to walk in beauty if they are to survive. Dine Be keyah must remain intact if the Navajo religion is to persist and flourish because the land is their life.

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